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ABSTRACT

More research is needed on the effect of summer vocational exploratory programs for disadvantaged youth. Because of the limited number of high schools which offer a wide range of vocational courses, only one out of every five high school students has the opportunity to pursue viable technical or occupationally specific goals. However, research finds that vocational education is effective in stemming the dropout rate and in providing a training ground for basic entry-level jobs. The existing literature on summer vocational exploratory programs for disadvantaged youth confirms the positive effects of participation in such programs. Examples of summer exploratory programs that have had positive results include the following: a cooperative program developed by the Career Development Center and the Regional Vocational Technical School in Blackstone Valley, Massachusetts; Summer Youth Employment Program (STEP) pilot projects that were implemented in Boston, Baltimore, and Pinellas County in Florida; a prevocational exploratory program for educationally disadvantaged ninth graders that was offered in the Minneapolis Public Schools; and a sex-fair, experience-based career education program that was offered to junior and senior high school students in Little Rock, Arkansas. Such programs have resulted in improvement in work habits and attitudes, decision-making skills, and job placement rates for students as well as in greater awareness of post-high school educational opportunities and gains in choices of nonstereotyped occupations. (MN)

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VOCATIONAL EXPLORATORY

PROGRAMS:

CAREER SELECTIONS AND ATTITUDES

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For the urban student who is of low socio-economic status, career or educational goals of any importance are usually of the least concern. His survival is, in most cases, from day to day. To graduate from high school is for many a miracle.

The National Center for Educational Statistics provides a profile of a high school dropout (1980). "Most come from the bottom 25% in terms of family income and education. They are males, live in a single-parent home, lack basic skills, have control over their future. Generally, they don't fit into an academic environment " (Education USA, January, 1986, p 138). The drop-out rate for low socio-economic high school students is currently over 50%

Henry David in a vocational education report for the National Institute of Education stated that vocational education must be a part of a larger context, both as it relates to the national workforce and economic needs and to the high school curriculum("Education USA," June 27, 1983, p 339).

By 1990, manufacturing will provide only 6-8% of the jobs; service industries will dominate. Education must cope with the rapid, technological changes which are affecting our society. It is of paramount importance that all students be equipped with the skills to foster their own economic well-being as well as the nation's. In order to meet this need, high school

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students, especially those of low socio-economic background who mistakenly feel they have nothing to offer, must realize the necessity of career aspirations, career options, and career training because these will ultimately effect their survival.

Unfortunately, very little research has been done to analyze or ascertain the effect of summer vocational exploratory programs on low socio-economic groups. More research needs to be done.

In recent years the process of educating elementary and secondary students has been continually attacked by the media, parents, politicians, the business community - vitually anyone who can speak or write. Vocational educational has been hardest hit because many feel that its value has always been suspect, and now its mere existence is being threatened. Butler (1985) schools are not doing their job: a high level of literacy, responsible attitudes toward work, and good communication skills are more important than vocational skills. Tull (1984) critics of vocational education fall into three groups: 1) any program which prepares a person for work is a stigmatizing activity which can be as charity for the needy, poor, or handicapped; 2) any subject area which cannot be measured easily by achievement tests is a waste of time; and 3) others want vocational education post-poned until th post-secondary level.

If we state that most of those who work are on an 8 hour work day, then we spend approximately one third of our lives at work. Surely

vocational education has value. Unfortunately, little has been said recently about the opportunities it provides or about its measured successes.

Even though employers and according to national polls, parents and students believe that secondary schools should prepare students for employment, only 6,000 of the 24,000 high schools in the United States offer more than five vocational courses. Eighty - 90% of the students take at least one. In other words only one out of every five high school students have the opportunity to pursue viable "technical or occupationally--specific goals. Yet research finds that vocational education is effective in stemming the dropout rate and in providing a training ground for basic entry level jobs. (Tull) 1984.

LaMar (1986) describes a cooperative program developed by the Career Development Center and the Regional Vocational Technical School in Blackstone Valley, Massachusetts that impacted disadvantaged youth aged 14-15. A summer vocational exploratory program was implemented that used the rules of the workplace rather than school rules. Teachers volunteered to conduct the classes and were counseled to treat the students as adult-employees. When the program was evaluated by the student participants, 54 - 80% of the responses were positive when asked to rate the program, teachers, and the interest for more training. Students realized at the completion of the program that it is as important to eliminate career possibilities as it is to choose the one that best suits you.

Michael Bailin (1984) piloted a Summer Youth Employment Program (STEP) which was conducted in Boston, Baltimore, and Pinellas County Florida. STEP placed 14 and 15 year-olds in a summer employment program which also had an academic and life planning component. Overall, participants made "significant gains" in basic academic skills, some progress in the knowledge of job opportunities, contraception, and the burden of teen parenting. One of the critical findings of the program was that learning losses occur during the summer with teens who lack basic skills and are approaching the legal age to quit school (Education USA, 1986)

Warren and Finch (1974) found that student attitudes and interests changed especially among males when summer institutes were conducted exposing students to a variety of vocations over a two-year period. Fourteen percent of the total experimental group enrolled in post-secondary educational programs as compared to 5% of the control group.

Advisory Committee, Minneapolis Public Schools, (1972) provides data that students who participated in the work Experience Career Exploration Program (a pre-vocational exploratory program for educationally disadvantaged 9th graders that emphasized individual talents, social skills development and the social and economic worth of the individual) showed significant improvement in behaviors and attitudes such as cooperation, pride in work, and completion of tasks among participants.

The Arkansas State Department of Education in Little Rock (1979) developed a sex-fair experience based career education program and activities for junior and senior high school students. Evaluative data showed 1) little improvement in basic academic skills, 2) improvement in work habits and

positive student attitudes, 3) improvement in decision-making skills and career awareness, 4) greater awareness of post-high school education opportunities, 5) greater gains in choices of non-stereotyped occupations by participants than non-participants 6) positive employer response which rated students on sixteen work characteristics, and 7) good placement and follow-up services for students.

Torrez (1979) investigated the effect of the vocational exploration group on high school students. Using measures of attitude, information-seeking behaviors and, knowledge of interests and skills an analysis of variance showed that treatment subjects had significantly higher scores on the knowledge measure than did the control subjects.

Even studies conducted by Patterson (1979) Takai and Holland (1977) found that different vocational self-directed treatments (VEIK, VCS, and SDS) have similar rather than divergent effects and that student participants are more career-minded and have more positive attitudes toward careers.

It is, however, necessary for educators to realize the role that summer vocational exploratory programs can play in aiding low socio-economic students.

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